SD #70 (Alberni) District Review Report

District Name: Alberni School District: **District Number**: 70

Superintendent: Harry Janzen

Date of Visit: March 9th to 12th, 2003

Team Chair:
Peter Porte, Superintendent SD #52 – Prince Rupert School District

Team Members:
Bruce Deacon, Manager, Corporate Planning and Strategic Initiatives, Ministry of Education;
Rick Erickson, Deputy Superintendent, SD # 42 – Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows;
Judy Halbert, Lead Director, Accountability, Monitoring and Reporting, Ministry of Education;
Doris Kemp, Teacher, SD #28 – Quesnel;
Gloria Raphael, Principal, SD #61 – Greater Victoria;
Sharyl Samodien, District Parent Representative, SD #75 – Mission

Context

The Review Team recognizes the challenging conditions which the Alberni School District has faced over a number of years with respect to all the consequences that go directly and indirectly with a declining student population.

Most recently, there have been school closures and reconfigurations. In the midst of this restructuring process, the Review Team commends all partners for also maintaining a strong focus on student achievement.

Mandate

Improving student achievement for all students is the primary goal established by the Ministry of Education in conjunction with each of the sixty (60) School Districts in the province. The district review process reflects the commitment of the various educational partners to work cooperatively together to ensure optimum levels of student performance are achieved.

The Alberni School District Review is one of 20 school district reviews being undertaken in the 2002/03 school year. The specific purposes of the school district review is to provide feedback and recommendations to the district, the Ministry of Education and the public regarding the district's work in improving student achievement by:

- reviewing district and school achievement data;
- reviewing the district accountability contract and school plans to improve student achievement;
- making recommendations to the board and to the Minister about improving student achievement; and
- identifying promising practices that will assist other districts and schools in their efforts to improve student achievement.

Summary of Process

The District Review Team, in addressing the above purposes, reviewed the following:

- the Local Education Agreement;
- the District Accountability Contract;
- School Plans for all of the schools in the district, with particular attention to the plans for the schools being visited by the review team;
- progress of the school district and selected schools in meeting their goals and performance targets;
- strategies employed at the school and district levels used to support the district Accountability Contracts and school plans; and
- various materials provided by school staff as examples of work that they are doing to achieve their school goals.

The Review Team, studied various district and school planning documents, student achievement results and supporting data and reports, and met with the District Leadership Team to discuss the district's Accountability Contract, services, programs, practices and results. The team conducted a series of school-based meetings and met with representatives of the District Parents Advisory Council, the First Nations staff and the Alberni Teacher's Union.

These discussions focused on the ten key points of inquiry which are based on current school and district effectiveness and improvement research.

The District Review Team members visited the following thirteen (13) of the district's nineteen (19) schools:

- Howitt Elementary
- A. W. Neill Elementary -Junior Secondary
- Redford Elementary
- Wood Elementary
- Gill Elementary
- Eighth Avenue Elementary
- Sproat Elementary
- E.J. Dunn Junior Secondary
- Alberni Elementary
- Alberni District Secondary
- Ucluelet Secondary
- VAST Centre
- Wickaninnish Elementary

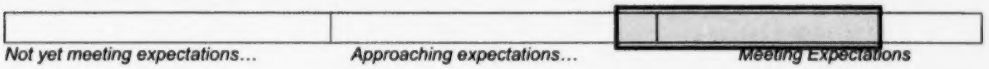
The Review Team met with principals, vice-principals, teachers, support staff, parent representatives, Aboriginal support workers, members of the community, and students.

The District Review Team would like to extend their appreciation to all members of the Alberni educational community for their involvement in this process and their support of public education.

Observations in Ten (10) Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Goals:* Clarity and relevance of goals in accountability contract and school plans

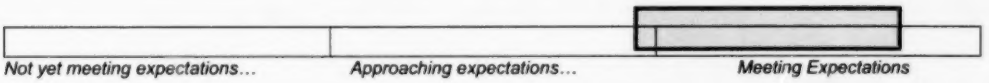
   "Improving districts have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in clear goals for improving student learning."



- The district has developed clear goals for student learning in language arts and mathematics and is doing considerable work in these areas. The breadth and depth of this work is impressive and is directly linked to student achievement.
- The district's third goal relates to students feeling safe at school. The Review Team supports the perceived shift to expand this focus to include social responsibility.
- The Review Team emphasizes the importance of the district's goal to improve the graduation rate and urges all the partners to continue their efforts in this area.
- The last district goal relates to improving students' decision-making capabilities around post secondary and career transitions. The Review Team believes that work in this area could contribute to improved school completion rates. The review team suggests that the last two goals are closely related and could be combined.

2. *Rationale:* Rationale for selection of goals, and attention paid to specific groups of students

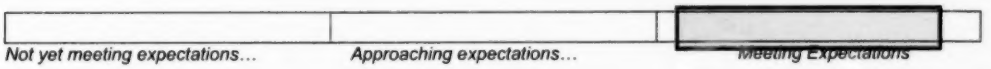
   "Improving districts have a thorough and connected set of reasons based on evidence for the selection of their student achievement goals."



- There is ample evidence to support both district and school goals. The rationale is clearly stated in most school plans.
- The Review Team notes that the 'why ' of the goals (the rationale) could not always be clearly articulated by all partners. A clear understanding of the rationale for improvement efforts, may lead to an even greater sense of commitment, connection and focus among all partners.

3. *Data:* Use of data in selection of goals and for tracking progress

   "Improving districts are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school and district / provincial data. The analysis of this evidence has informed the selection of the district goals."



- The district is well positioned to use data effectively. Many sources of data (provincial, district, school and classroom) are being used. There has been strong professional development support for assessment literacy.
- The Review Team notes a real interest in the use classroom assessment. In particular, interest and use of performance standards to inform instruction is increasing. A more universal use of performance standards should lead to significant improvements in student achievement.
- The Review Team encourages the district to continue to provide support to both educators and parents in understanding and using data to inform decision-making.
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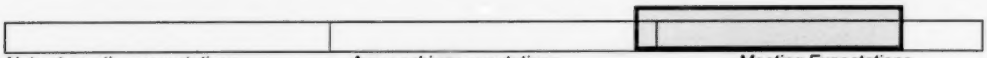
4. *Strategies:* Strategies used to achieve goals

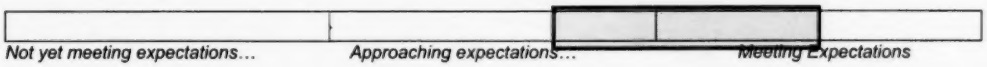
"Improving districts have a well-organized, focused improvement plan in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking."



- The Review Team observed numerous, thoughtful, innovative and research-based strategies connected to district and school goals.
- Many of these strategies are supported by intensive, focused and sustained professional development.
- The Review Team heard repeatedly the importance and value of the sharing of strategies and professional dialogue at principal and vice principal's meetings.
- The Review Team encourages continued sharing of strategies and professional dialogue. Consideration should be given to extend this practice to the larger community (for example, members of the Aboriginal communities, teacher assistants and parents).

5. *Structures:* Structures aligned to achieve results

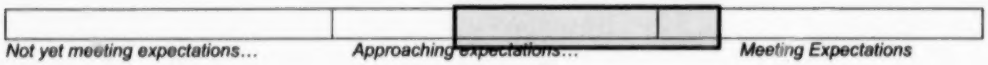
"Improving districts have aligned structures – resources, time, organizations – to get the results they want. This includes effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement."



- The district is purposeful in aligning resources to support student learning goals. The Review Team encourages district to continue this practice.
- Many elementary and junior secondary schools are using innovative ways to organize time and available resources in support of their learning goals.
- The Review Team believes that to realize a significant increase in graduation rates, time, attention, and resources need to be focused on secondary student learning and staff development.

6. *Results:* Results are monitored

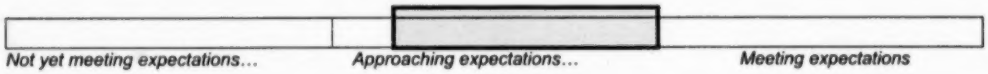
"Improving districts get improved student learning results – at the classroom, school and district levels."



- Base-line data is well established. Most schools are in the early stages of monitoring results.
- There are encouraging signs of progress towards achieving the district and schools' targets for improvement.

7. *Communication:* Results are communicated with the broad community

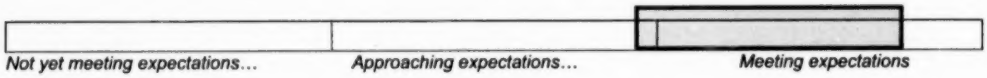
"Improving districts communicate and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made."



- There is evidence of effective communication tools at many schools (for example, e-mail, web-sites, newsletters, phone calls, and open-houses).
- The Review Team encourages the district and the schools to use a variety of mechanisms to regularly communicate their goals for improving student learning. In addition, continuous updates on the progress being made will strengthen support for the improvement initiatives.

8. *Teamwork* – District and School Coherence

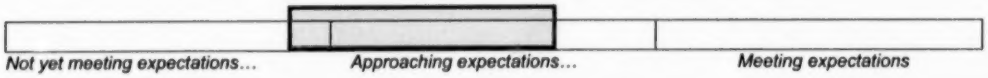
"Improving districts have a dynamic and interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school-district directions are both valued."



- The district is characterized by high levels of collaboration and support. There is a pervasive sense of "being in it all together" coupled with a high degree of commitment to students.
- This is a district which effectively balances the uniqueness of its schools and a shared sense of purpose.
- The Review Team notes a good connection between school and district goals and commends the district for creating this sense of alignment.
- The Review Team believes that the district's on-going commitment to "learning communities" and the continuous work on shared vision has contributed to a strong sense of teamwork.

9. *Teamwork* – District and Parent Involvement

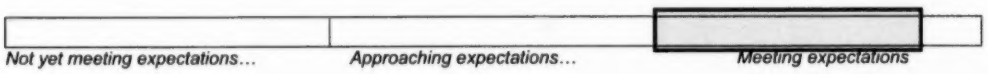
"Improving districts work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, on improving student learning."



- The Review Team notes that the degree of parental involvement in the day-to-day activities at schools ranges from fair to impressive.
- Parent involvement in the development of school plans is a relatively new concept for many schools.
- The implementation of School Planning Councils will increase parent involvement in planning for student success.
- The Review Team encourages the district and the schools to continue to enhance school-home-community connections in support of student achievement.

10. *Leadership / Teamwork:* Clear vision and commitment

"Improving districts are led by district leaders with a clear vision for and commitment to school improvement and improving student achievement. Principals, vice-principals, teacher, parent and student leadership is encouraged and systematically developed – with a focus on improving student learning."



- The District Leadership Team is committed to and focused on improved student achievement.
- The District Leadership Team actively encourages principal and teacher leadership.
- Extending leadership opportunities to all partners (e.g.parents, Aboriginal support workers, teacher assistants, support staff) through the district work on learning communities will further enhance the commitment to student learning.
- Student leadership is apparent in many schools.

Strengths

This is a district with many strengths. In particular, the Review Team notes the following:

- Highly professional educators committed to student learning;
- A district leadership team whose priority is student learning;
- Caring, collaborative, and cooperative relationships;
- The range and quality of assessment data;
- A sustained, quality professional development program;
- The emphasis on Aboriginal culture as fundamental to student success;
- The alignment of school and district goals; and
- The capacity of the district to confront challenges directly.

Promising Practices

The Review Team identifies the following programs or practices as potentially helpful to other districts:

- The sustained focused professional development program including the use of master teachers, demonstration lessons, and continuity of approach over time;
- The district developed Mathematics assessment in Grades 2 and 6;
- The district emphasis on building learning communities;
- The thoughtful, well planned process for dealing with school closures and reconfiguration; and
- The VAST Centre's integrated and exemplary approach to alternative education.

Recommendations

The Review Team recommends the following to improve student achievement:

- Continue to focus on the use of assessment data for student learning at all levels.
- Sustain the positive momentum in early literacy and numeracy.
- Build on strengths in early literacy and numeracy to include intermediate, middle, and secondary learners.
- The district has identified improving graduation rates and school completion as a goal. Find ways to focus strategies and structures (time, resources, organization) to realize this goal.
- Improving the results of Aboriginal students must be a priority. The team believes that specific, clear, focused, measurable goals to improve Aboriginal achievement would be appropriate.
- Continue to provide sustained in-service for principals and vice principals, as a group, to support their leadership role in improving student achievement. Additional support for some individual school-based leaders is required to ensure an effective focus on student learning is maintained across the district.
- As added resources become available, ensure that student learning goals remain a priority.